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NESTA WEBSTER: The Voice of Conspiracy

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Nesta Helen Webster (1876-1960) was one of the most influential conspiracy theorists of the twentieth century. Although an advocate of women's rights early in her life, her conviction that a vast and dangerous conspiracy threatened the British state and Christian civilization soon overshadowed these concerns. During her lifetime, she was a woman of considerable political influence, but she is perhaps even more influential today. Her books remain in print, and her work is a foundation of many far-right ideologies, including those of the John Birch Society and the Militia and Patriot movements. Webster's life and work are illustrative of the paradoxical position of women of the far right, both in the early twentieth century and today. [PUBLICATION ABSTRACT]

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[Headnote]

Nesta Helen Webster (1876-1960) was one of the most influential conspiracy theorists of the twentieth century. Although an advocate of women's rights early in her life, her conviction that a vast and dangerous conspiracy threatened the British state and Christian civilization soon overshadowed these concerns. During her lifetime, she was a woman of considerable political influence, but she is perhaps even more influential today. Her books remain in print, and her work is a foundation of many far-right ideologies, including those of the John Birch Society and the Militia and Patriot movements. Webster's life and work are illustrative of the paradoxical position of women of the far right, both in the early twentieth century and today.

Early-twentieth-century Britain saw the emergence of numerous far-right political groups. Women played a significant role in many of these movements. In 1923, Rothera Linton Orman founded the British Fascist!, and during the 1930s, the British Union of Fascists' membership was at least 25 percent female.¹ Among these right-wing women, however, activist and author Nesta Helen Webster stood out. During her lifetime (1876-1960), she was a woman of considerable political influence and, through her many books and articles, she remains influential today. Her work is a foundation for many modern American far-right political ideologies, including those of Pat Robertson, the John Birch Society, and the Militia and Patriot movements, and it is a component of a number of radical Islamist ideologies. As an outstanding figure of her generation, she is therefore of interest to historians and, as an author influential in both the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries, she is of interest to political scientists.

Webster wrote three novels, but her works of "nonfiction" are the source of her political significance. She effectively popularized complex conspiracy theories and, in so doing, provided a framework for political action. During her lifetime, Webster published eight lengthy works of politics and history, many of which went into multiple editions and still remain in print. She wrote during a period of profound political and social change: the British Empire peaked and declined, World War I transformed European politics and society, and British women obtained the vote. Webster was a

conservative writer interested in history, power, and politics, and she questioned the origin and character of these rapid and drastic changes.

Webster's life, ideas, and influence are intrinsically intriguing. They also, however, reveal the paradoxical position of women of the far right, both in the early twentieth century and today. Although she was an advocate of traditional roles for women, Webster was frustrated with the professional opportunities available to her. Like American maternal feminists of the 1920s, she argued that women's most important function was to exert a "civilizing" influence on men, but she also aimed to inspire women to political action, and in the late 1920s she became a political activist herself.² Also paradoxically, her ideas are influential today in political and religious movements wherein women typically do not play significant roles. This article examines these paradoxes through a consideration of Webster's life and political ideas.

Despite her importance, very little has been written about Webster. She has received mention in the major analyses of women and 1920s British fascism, but her life and work were not the foci of that research.³ Indeed, historians Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow have written that "the most glaring gap" in this literature "is a serious consideration of the ideas and influence of Nesta Webster."⁴ In part, this may be due to her limited official role within the fascist movement.

>Although she was sympathetic to portions of the fascist platform, and a tremendously influential figure within the movement, her formal links to it were short-lived. Similarly, Webster often has been discussed briefly in studies of modern conspiracy theory, for her writings were the critical germ of many modern conspiratorialist visions, but she wrote during the 1920s.⁵ Thus, these scholars have discussed her influence, but have not focused on her directly. Webster was also what sociologists Nigel Fielding and Kathleen Blee have termed a member of an "unloved group."⁶ It is difficult to research groups whose ideologies are hostile and abhorrent. Webster's beliefs, and those of later groups who were inspired by her work, are in this category and, as a result, they are not appealing research subjects. In her analysis of right-wing women and hate groups in the United States, Blee has discussed this problem at length. She concluded, quite reasonably, that to avoid such topics is dangerous; their political potential alone should impel us to become knowledgeable about them, in order to more effectively work against them.

For all of these reasons, Webster has eluded study in the major literatures that might assess her life and work. Only private scholar Richard Gilman's short self-published *Behind World Revolution* has examined Webster's life. Gilman was concerned about Webster's influence on the American right, and this work was his attempt to actively combat it. The book was well-researched, and provided a good summary of the early part of her life-and was notable for its detailed bibliography-but it was limited in its assessment of Webster's ideology.⁷

Researching Webster's life and work is problematic. The vast majority of her personal papers are lost, and, while some of her research notes remain, they are located in private collections that are unavailable to researchers.⁸ This lack of unpublished personal material means that it is impossible to access Webster's unmediated thoughts, and one must piece together the events of her life from newspaper accounts and her books and articles. Her autobiography, *Spacious Days*, is an insightful guide to the formation of her early political beliefs, but it concludes as she begins her career as a conspiracy theorist. She wrote at the end of *Spacious Days* that her work determined the course of her life: "In revealing the truth about that tragic epoch in what I imagined to be merely an academic work of history I had entered the lists against terrific living forces of which I had not guessed the existence. My own life was now to become a prolonged contest with these unseen powers. But that is another story which would require a whole volume to itself." Her discovery of the "truth" of history changed her life, and determined her career. While she wrote a second volume of her autobiography, it disappeared from her publisher's office, apparently under mysterious circumstances.¹⁰

Webster, however, was a prolific author, and in different stages of her life it is possible to trace her activities and focus through her many speeches and publications. Inevitably, this method lacks an ideal richness of insight and detail, but it does allow for a consideration of her life, which until now, has been relatively absent in the scholarly literature.

Nesta Webster's Life

Recent literature on women's participation in modern right-wing movements has helped to assess Webster's life and influence. Even so, it is not immediately applicable. Many of these works have focused on a particular movement or issues that are not relevant to Webster's experience.¹¹ Blee's analysis of women in the American hate movement is most apposite for studying Webster. Although her book focused on a specific group, its theoretical framework is useful, because it touched on issues that are relevant to Webster's beliefs.

Notably, Blee has provided a framework to analyze why women join hate groups. She has written that although some scholarship has suggested that women become right-wing activists as a result of brainwashing and maladjustment, these explanations are not satisfactory. They deny women's free choice, and/or imply they should not be taken seriously. It is more effective and accurate to understand that women make these choices as rational political actors.

They perceive their interests as served through these belief systems.¹² Many of the women Blee studied recounted their conversion as a "dramatic personal transformation" in which they moved from naïveté to enlightenment, that is, they were similar to religious conversions. Believers typically interpreted their previous life as meaningless, and stressed the greater awareness they obtained after their conversion.¹³ This is a fitting assessment of Webster's adoption of a conspiratorial view of history. For Blee's subjects, however, this conversion process was inherently personal, and caused them to reinterpret their own past to consolidate their beliefs. Webster, however, was moved to integrate these ideas into her historical writing. Rather than accommodating her life to a set of beliefs, she created an ideology.

Likewise, Blee's female subjects recounted substantially changing their identity and interests as they became part of the hate movement, a process than contrasts markedly with the experience of their male counterparts. According to Blee, male members were inclined to see the racist movement as a positive "self-aggrandizing" opportunity.¹⁴ In this context too, Webster was an anomaly, for she did not radically adapt herself to others' expectations, but instead used her association with the British Fascists to further her own interests.

In terms of the women of her generation, Webster thus stood out as an author, speaker, and activist. In terms of the experience of even modern right-wing women, Webster was also remarkable. She created an ideology, used the British Fascists to publicize and popularize it, and exerted her influence to obtain political goals.

Nesta Helen Bevan was born on 14 August 1876 at her family's estate, Trent Park, near Barnet, in Hertfordshire. Her father, Robert Cooper Lee Bevan, was a great grandson of the founders of Barclay, Bevan, Tritton, and Co., which later became Barclays Bank.¹⁵ Her mother, Frances Shuttleworth, was the daughter of the Bishop of Chichester. When she married Bevan in 1856, he was a widower with six children. Shuttleworth bore eight children with him, of whom Webster was the youngest.

The early years of Webster's childhood were spent primarily at Trent Park, but during August the family stayed at Fosbury Park, her father's property in Wiltshire, and in the autumn they lived in their London home overlooking Hyde Park. Although the Bevans were wealthy, Webster suggested that her upbringing was by no means luxurious, because her father had "devoted his life to the service of God."¹⁶ Since so few of her personal papers have been found, it is difficult to determine how religion affected her political views. However, in *Spacious Days* she implied that her father, his religious faith, and his appreciation for the community were never fully appreciated by his banking colleagues. Barclays' success, she argued, "was made ... by the known integrity and good faith of the men who used the wealth it brought them/or the service of the community [emphasis added]."¹⁷ The importance of religion and the British political community were later to become important themes in her writing.

Webster's autobiography suggested that she was more sympathetic to her father's religious beliefs than those of her mother. Shuttleworth was an Anglican at the time of her marriage to Bevan, but joined the Plymouth Brethren shortly afterwards. Shuttleworth's devotion to this "gloomy creed," as Webster described it, cut her off from both her family and society. Indeed, Webster wrote that "only once do I remember seeing her appear in the day nursery, then merely to give an order to a nurse, and the sight of her tall, majestic figure was so unprecedented that I could hardly have been more amazed if Queen Victoria herself, in robes and crown, with ball and sceptre complete, had swept into the room."¹⁸

Webster's early life was therefore marked by both her parents' strong religious beliefs. They allowed little entertainment, and Sundays were particularly bleak. In 1881, the family began spending the winter in Cannes for the sake of Bevan's health. The children's social isolation continued there. Webster studied with various governesses, but her older sisters, who were never allowed the social rite of "coming out," contented themselves with occasional social engagements and keeping journals. Webster wrote of that period, "tea with the daughters of a French pastor was our wildest dissipation."¹⁹

In the spring of 1890, Webster's father died, and ten days later Webster left Trent Park.²⁰ The family home passed to her eldest half-brother, while her mother inherited the family's villa in Cannes. Webster thus lived out the remainder of her youth in Europe, a period that she regarded as an "exile" from Britain, and during which she was lonely and unhappy.²¹ Upon reaching the age of seventeen, however, she returned to England to finish her education. Although she wanted to attend Cambridge or Oxford, her mother believed both institutions to be too liberal, and forbade it. As a result, she attended ~~Westfield College in Hampstead~~, where she initially entered a degree program in classics and mental and moral science. Frustrated by the required algebra courses, however, she eventually chose to continue her studies as a non-degree student, attending lectures in which she had an interest, primarily, as she records it, in English literature, Greek, and mental and moral science.

Webster left college in 1897, the year she turned twenty-one and inherited her share of Bevan's estate. She wrote: "I

had lived long enough now amongst women working for a purpose to despise an idle life and long to embark on some useful career. But what careers were open to women at that date? I might train to become a High School teacher like most of my college companions, but would it be right to take the bread out of the mouth of someone who needed it?"²² In the end, she chose an extended tour around the world that included Africa, India, Ceylon, Japan, and Canada. On this journey, she developed a respect for all religions, concluding that "behind all great religions there lies a central truth, which might be compared to a lamp with many coloured sides."²³ Her open-mindedness on the subject of religion was also reflected in her particular respect for Buddhism, which led her to spend an extended period of time in Burma, a place she was "heartbroken" to leave.²⁴

Upon her return to Britain, she took up chaperoned residence at the Hans Mansions (apartments that once existed above the Harrod's store in Kensington, London). Again Webster was frustrated by the lack of opportunities available to her. As a female member of the "educated class," she felt that she had only three career options: nurse, school teacher, or district visitor. None of these appealed to her, and she felt that marriage, a fourth choice, would be "the end of all adventure and it terrified me by its irrevocability."²⁵ Despite this, she did not participate in the suffrage movement, for she believed that merely obtaining the vote would not rectify the injustices that women suffered. Their place in society needed to change fundamentally. For Webster, all human beings, including women, needed "an object in life."²⁶ Women should not just work as a means of livelihood, but also as a profession.

During this period, Webster became increasingly convinced that her true vocation was writing, but she believed that if she were ever to write anything of value, she ought to see more of the world. She therefore embarked on a second trip to Egypt, and in 1903, left for an extended trip to Ceylon, Australia, and India.²⁷ It was during the latter part of this trip, while at Fatehgarh, that she was introduced to Arthur Webster, a District Superintendent of Police. They were engaged within three weeks, and married on 14 May 1904. Webster reported very few of the events between 1904 and 1914; as explanation, she wrote that it may well be true that a happy woman has no history.²⁸ During these years she gave birth to two daughters, Marjorie and Rosalind, and began her writing career.

Webster's first novel, *The Sheep Track*, appeared in 1914. It reflected her frustration at the limited opportunities open to women. The book chronicled the life of a young woman who left her father's sheltered home in Nice to travel to London in order to "come out" in society. She soon determined, however, that London society was a "sheep track"; it was a world wherein "girls married amidst the applause of their friends to men they merely regarded as the inevitable accompaniment of substantial incomes ... [a] system of pretended virtue...."²⁹ To live according to one's own moral sense and convictions was tremendously difficult. Webster's heroine dabbled in "bohemian" society, eventually left London, and traveled to Burma, Siam, and Japan. She concluded that it was not on the sheep track that the solutions to life's problems were to be found. The origins of Webster's title revealed the moral of her story. It was drawn directly from Seneca: "Let us not, therefore, follow like sheep, but rather govern ourselves by reason than by other men's fashions (emphasis in original)."³⁰

The Sheep Track paralleled Webster's own life: her sheltered existence in Cannes, her education and difficult experiences in London, and her decision to embark on extended world travel. The novel received generally favorable reviews (the New York Times referred to it as "delightful"), and within six months it was in its fourth printing.³¹ Despite its popularity, the book was not particularly compelling reading; it did, however, condemn the nature of women's lives in early-twentieth-century society, and forcefully argued that they should pursue meaningful careers.

In the autumn of 1914 Webster published her first overtly political tract, *Britain's Call to Arms: An Appeal to our Women*. In it, she called on British women to encourage men to join the war effort. Webster argued that for every "one man who has answered the call to arms a dozen women have responded.... [N]eedlework and nursing remain so far almost the only ways by which, at this critical hour, the great majority of women can . . . serve their country."³² *Britain's Call to Arms* suggested that women were both more willing to serve their country in the war effort than men, and more capable of understanding the implications of German victory, which would result in "an iron government such as they have never dreamt of,... all personal liberty would be done away with."³³ It was therefore incumbent upon British women to make British men aware of the gravity of the situation.

Webster's faith in women's political capabilities-indirect as it may have been-was echoed in a later article, "Women and Civilisation" (1920). There, she argued that men were wholly ignorant of women's true nature; the only type of women they knew anything about, she wrote, were "Primitive Women," who lived to serve only the material needs of men and their offspring. Webster wrote that these women, whose horizons were "entirely bounded" by men, did not seek their own individual development, and were therefore "inevitably the inferior" of men.³⁴ When women were left so "uneducated, uncultivated, unenlightened, [they were] too often the foolish, futile creature[s]" that ignorant men believed all women to be.³⁵

Webster suggested that women were best served when they were "cultivated," well-educated, and refined. She wrote

X1 that women's education was so different and inferior to that of men, and their life experiences so circumscribed, that it was impossible to know how great their minds and abilities might truly be. When this situation was rectified, she implied, women and men might well be true equals. Webster concluded, however, that the golden era of women's supremacy was pre-revolutionary France, when powerful women never attempted to compete directly with men, but instead drew strength from other areas where they excelled, in particular, "the power of organisation and the power of inspiration."³⁶ In this way, they extended a powerful influence over their society. The article closed with a call for women's political action. Women's power, she wrote, must be exerted in order to preserve "civilisation" in the postwar era.

Webster's work thus reflected many of the themes of her age; her pleas for the recognition of women were in part an argument for women to exert a "civilizing influence" on society. At the same time, however, she called on women to abandon the life of the "primitive woman" and she demanded that all women receive a better education and greater opportunities. In her later writings, however, these themes were absent. She did not abandon these beliefs, but what was for her a greater cause took precedence. An experience she had four years before writing *The Sheep Track* came to dominate her political agenda. Indeed, it marked the remainder of her life.

In the winter of 1910, while living in Switzerland, Webster came across *Portraits de Grandes Dames*, a volume of essays by Imbert de Saint-Amand. In it, she read of the Comtesse de Sabran, and her lover, the Chevalier de Boufflers, aristocrats whose lives were entwined with the French Revolution. She was captivated, and upon her return to London, acquired a compilation of their letters, *Correspondance de la Comtesse de Sabran et du Chevalier de Boufflers* (1875). Webster immersed herself in their story, and became convinced that much of it was familiar to her. ➤ Indeed, she developed the sense that she had personally lived through the French Revolution. This realization caused her to reflect on and reinterpret much of her life. She wrote, "Now all the memories of my childhood came flooding back to me, the sense of apartness from the family circle in the old days at Trent, that first journey to Paris, the arrival at the Gare du Nord. . . . Walking through the streets, especially in the Rue Saint-Honoré, I would say to myself, 'I have seen these streets running with blood.'"³⁷ Webster's Buddhist leanings inclined her to believe that she was the reincarnation of a French aristocrat, possibly even Madame de Sabran herself.³⁸

Webster's 1916 book, *The Chevalier de Boufflers*, recounted the Chevalier and Madame Sabran's lengthy romance. It received reasonable reviews, and it was certainly popular with the general public (it was ultimately reprinted fifteen times).³⁹ Indeed, Thurlow has suggested that based on the quality of this work, Webster could have become "a fine popular historian," as the book evidenced strong literary skills and a "meticulous attention to detail."⁴⁰ In conducting her research, however, Webster also determined that much of what had been written about the Revolution was false. During the last two years of the First World War she therefore continued her study of the French Revolution, driven by an "impelling force" to present the truth to the world.⁴¹ The result of that effort, *The French Revolution: A Study in Democracy*, was published in 1920. The work embodied the coming together of her personal interest in the Revolution with her developing political ideology.

Webster's great sympathy for the Chevalier de Boufflers and Madame Sabran extended to the French aristocracy as a whole. Indeed, one reviewer commented on her "unsympathetic attitude toward democracy," and her reliance on royalist and anti-republican sources.⁴² Webster cited Gustav LeBon, and argued that it was impossible for the masses to create such an upheaval themselves.⁴³ It was therefore reasonable, she argues, to ask "by whom was it made?" ➤ Webster concluded that the motive power behind the French Revolution was a combination of four critical conspiracies: "the Orléaniste intrigue for a change of dynasty, the Prussian scheme for breaking the Franco-Austrian Alliance, the gradually evolved conception of a Republic, finally of a Socialist State and behind them all the dark design of 'illuminized Freemasonry' working for world revolution and the destruction of Christian civilization."⁴⁴ With that statement, Webster also declared her future "research" program. ➤ Over the next two decades, she focused her attention on revealing the role that she believed secret societies played in history. By the close of 1937, she had published four more major works on the subject, as well as a novel, and two more lengthy tomes that dealt specifically with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

The French Revolution was not entirely well-received by the mainstream press. By the time of its publication, Webster was an established author, and the book was more widely reviewed in both the popular press and academic journals than her previous efforts. Critics attacked her focus on conspiracies and her royalist sympathies.⁴⁵ By the time of the book's publication, she was convinced that from the time of Baron Weishaupt, through the Illuminati and Freemasons, secret societies had influenced the direction of human history. Their power was now exerted through many agencies, but particularly those on the political left. Webster identified the Soviet Union, and Bolsheviks, as particular international threats. This "alien conspiracy" had now invaded Britain, the "greatest stronghold of Christian Civilisation." Within the United Kingdom, workers' unions, the British Communist Party, and Sinn Féin (an organization she believed was directed by the "International Communist Movement") were working for revolution.⁴⁶

During the 1920s, Webster combined her prolific writing career with political activism; her autobiography also concluded at this point. Her growing political visibility, however, combined with her newspaper columns and books, give some indication of her activities and intellectual development during this, her most politically active decade.

In this period, Webster published three of her most influential works on conspiracy, along with a lengthy political pamphlet aimed at the American public. In addition, she wrote a substantial number of articles for the British far-right periodical, *The Patriot*, and two conspiracy-related articles for the more mainstream journal, *The Nineteenth Century and After*. She focused on developing her conspiracy theory, but her work also reveals that her views on women had become more conservative. By the close of the decade, she held two positions of considerable political visibility within the British right wing.

Webster's first major publication of the 1920s was *World Revolution: The Plot Against Civilization* (1921). In it, she wrote that the world was in crisis, as evidenced by the spread of socialism and anarchism. She argued that while many books had been written about these ideas, hers was the first to systematically connect secret societies' activities to the history of revolution.⁴⁷ Webster wrote: "The revolution through which we are now passing is not local but universal, it is not political but social, and its causes must be sought not in popular discontent, but in a deep-laid conspiracy that uses the people to their own undoing."⁴⁸

According to Webster, the origins of this conspiracy lay in the link between Grand Orient Freemasonry (and the Duc de Chartres, its Grand Master) and the Illuminati (recreated by Adam Weishaupt in 1776).⁴⁹ Webster claimed that at meetings in 1782, the two organizations formed an association that undertook a "definite revolutionary campaign" aimed at transforming human societies. Their goals included the creation of general mayhem and the destruction of all governments and religion. Through this, human beings could regain "primitive liberty," an idealized state of existence that existed before the chains of civilization limited human behavior and potential. These organizations now worked in secret, according to Webster, and animated some of the most influential political forces of the day, including "Bolshevism." Webster argued that both men and women were members of this conspiracy, with the latter "divided into two classes each with its own secret: the first to consist of women who would give an air of respectability to the Order, the second of 'light women' who would help to satisfy those brothers who have a penchant for pleasure."⁵⁰ Like men who were duped into becoming members of these secret societies, women were unaware that they were being used for other purposes.

According to Webster, the conspirators had the capacity to manipulate all those who were unaware of their scheme, for their powers were "terrible, unchanging, relentless, and wholly destructive . . . [they were] the greatest menace that has ever confronted the human race."⁵¹ In *World Revolution*, Webster therefore traced the history of secret societies from the French Revolution through the Russian Revolution; her aim was not just to educate British citizens, but also to inspire them to protect their state. She closed the book by linking these themes and emphasizing Britain's special role, suggesting that "this little island of ours [may] finally stem the tide of World Revolution and save not only herself, but Christian civilization."⁵²

Webster's analysis of the Illuminati/Weishaupt conspiracy theory was therefore a general warning to all British citizens, but she also made specific reference to women. Notably, she expressed particular fear over the effects of "State Socialism" and "Illuminized Freemasonry" on women, "[who] have obviously far more to lose than men by the destruction or even by a decrease of civilization," but her concern was not just for women's place in society. It was also for what she believed women would lose if British civilization were destroyed. All Britons would lose their democratic freedoms, including women. As a result, she did not criticize women's rights, but instead argued that "the Suffragist has everything to lose by the abolition of the Parliamentary system which accords her the vote she has so long demanded."⁵³ Preserving British civilization was a prerequisite for political rights, for both women and men.

Webster's theories about the role of secret societies, and eventually the role of the Jewish people, fell on willing ears. As historian Colin Holmes has pointed out, while extremist anti-Semites were relatively rare, there existed a generalized low level of anti-Semitic sentiment in post-World War I Britain.⁵⁴ There was perhaps no better example of this than Winston Churchill's 1920 speech "Zionism and Bolshevism." It addressed the issue of Jewish loyalty to Britain, and identified a "sinister confederacy" of internationalist Jews that was behind every subversive movement from the nineteenth century onwards. Notably, Churchill's source for this interpretation was Nesta Webster.⁵⁵

In 1924, Webster published what became her most influential work, *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*. She remarked in the Preface that she would prefer to return to her study of the French Revolution, but implied that it was her duty to further elucidate the origins of the current "revolutionary movement" that was "gathering strength for an onslaught not only on Christianity, but on all social and moral order."⁵⁶ The majority of this book focused on the early history of forces that Webster had identified elsewhere: Pan-Germanism, Freemasonry, and Illuminism. In this work, however, she also developed her arguments concerning the role of the Jewish people in this worldwide conspiracy.

✓ Webster's assessment of the Jewish role in secret societies deserves particular attention, as it was an important element of her popularity among modern far right political movements. Throughout the book, Webster discussed the role of Jews in specific secret societies. In her concluding chapter, "The Jewish Peril," however, she drew these points together, stating that "the immense problem of the Jewish Power [is] perhaps the most important problem with which the modern world is confronted."⁵⁷ Webster argued that the Cabala and other sources clearly indicate that "the hope for world-domination" was not an idea attributed to Jews by anti-Semites, "but a very real and essential part of their traditions."⁵⁸ Webster maintained that this tradition had developed since the time of Jesus; at its theological core, it was a desire to overthrow Christianity and Christian civilization. Jews had been effective, Webster noted, at utilizing secret societies for their own purposes. She wrote: "The influence of the Jews in all the five great powers at work in the world—Grand Orient Masonry, Theosophy, PanGermanism, International Finance, and Social Revolution—is not a matter of surmise but of fact."⁵⁹

✓ Likewise, she argued, they played a role in the world's "minor subversive movements": psychoanalysis, "degenerate art," the cinema world, and drug trafficking. According to Webster, their influence in British politics was also clear. They promoted Bolshevism through the Labour Party, and although Conservatism (because of its patriotic traditions) had typically been free of Jewish influence, it was "precisely at a moment when Conservative organization had passed largely into Jewish hands that Conservatism met with the most astounding disaster in the whole of its history."⁶⁰ Webster concluded this chapter by noting that the real danger to Britain (and Christian civilization) sprang from the unity of the Jewish people: "Far more potent than the sign of distress that summons Freemasons to each other's aid at moments of peril is the call of the blood that rallies the most divergent elements in Jewry to the defence of the Jewish cause."⁶¹

Webster argued that it was this solidarity that was the real cause of anti-Semitism. Even if it was true that the Jewish people were not the central force behind all secret societies, their threat came at a moment when Britain and "Christian civilization" were being "systematically destroyed by the doctrines of International Socialism."⁶² secret Societies and Subversive Movements thus suggested that the Jewish people were an integral part of the conspiratorial forces that threaten civilization. Webster concluded that the only way to save Britain from its imminent destruction was through a "great national movement," much like Italian Fascism.⁶³ It triumphed, she claimed, because it was democratic and progressive, and appealed to the most noble human instincts, patriotism and self-sacrifice.

In two important ways, Webster's secret Societies helped to determine the future direction of her life. First, her conclusions moved her to become more directly politically active. Second, it determined that despite her efforts to become a respectable historian of the French Revolution (and she published two more lengthy books on the topic), her lasting impact was to be as a conspiracy theorist. Indeed, the book's success made her a minor celebrity.

Webster quickly became a recognized "authority" on secret societies, and with that status, became a frequent contributor to the right-wing newspaper, *The Patriot*. There, she found an audience eager for her work. She published columns and engaged in debates relating to various conspiracy theories, and the paper's editors publicized her books and public appearances.⁶⁴ She also published long-running series on conspiracy related topics, for example, "Anti Revolutionary Organisation," which ran in seven parts through January and early February 1926. Her work was also frequently the subject of articles and commentary within the paper.

✓ During this time, Webster also became politically active in the British Fascists Ltd., a movement that was not immediately concerned with fascist ideology, but instead, focused its political program on the fear of a communist uprising, a concern dear to Webster's heart.⁶⁵ In joining the Fascists, Webster was not unusual. Recent analyses have made clear that the movement and its ideology were animated by women.⁶⁶ Her role was different, however, because she was politically prominent before she joined the movement. Indeed, historian Barbara Farr has speculated that Webster was drawn to the movement more as "a vehicle to disseminate her opinions rather than as a philosophy to be embraced."⁶⁷ In 1927, she became a member of its leadership, the Grand Council, and during her tenure spoke at their public meetings and wrote articles for the group's publications, *the Fascist Bulletin* and *the British Lion*.⁶⁸ The British Fascists afforded Webster increased political visibility, but she abandoned the Party in mid-1927, and instead embarked upon her own related political project, which she called "The Patriots' Inquiry Centre."⁶⁹

Webster believed that communism was making inroads in British society, and as evidence, she cited the fact that the Labour Party appeared to be strengthening its hold on the lower classes. Although it had officially repudiated communism, Webster believed this move was superficial and intended to placate concerned Britons. She argued that the Party admitted communists through its support of trade unionists. In an effort to counter their influence, she proposed a "bureau of information" that would serve as a clearing house for all workers in the "anti-Socialist cause," and she offered her own collection of research as a starting point for the Centre's library. In October of 1927 she first advertised the Centre in *The Patriot*. Although she noted that the financial support of "a few patriotic persons" had been obtained, and an office in central London secured, she also asked for further financial contributions. The Centre

would contribute to the anti-communist cause through coordinating the work of organizations and individuals "in every part of the world."⁷⁰

While documentary evidence suggests that the Patriots' Inquiry Centre was a viable operation for a number of years, evidence of its activities disappeared from the pages of The Patriot early in the 1930s. So too did original articles by Webster, although she did contribute a four-part series, "The Past History of World Revolution," in 1932. It was not until the late 1940s that she wrote for the The Patriot again. Her contribution was a seven-part series entitled "Where are We Going?" which focused on the threat socialism posed to Great Britain.⁷¹ Judging by her publications, Webster appears to have abandoned practical politics to once again pursue her writing career.

During the 1930s she published four books. The Surrender of an Empire continued her campaign to warn Britons of socialism and the various conspiracies that threatened the state, while The secret of the Zodiac, a deliberate work of fiction, likewise told the story of "sinister unseen forces" that aimed to undermine civilization. Webster wrote the latter book under the pseudonym Julian Sterne. It is likely that she chose this name to suggest that the book was authored by a Jewish man who would have an "insider's" knowledge of the world conspiracy; the name Sterne is also a composite of the last four letters of Webster, and the first two letters of Nesta. Although entertaining as a curiosity, the book is of dubious value as literature. Like her other conspiracy-related works, however, it remains in print.

Webster's two other major publications of the decade marked a return to her other favorite topic, the French Revolution. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette: Before the Revolution and Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette: During the Revolution were lengthy tomes published within a year of each other (1936, and 1937, respectively) in London and later in New York.⁷² These works presented a sympathetic picture of the French monarch and Marie Antoinette, as well as her argument that the French Revolution was devised and carried out by the Freemasons. These works were widely reviewed; most reviewers criticized Webster's argument, but praised her skills as an historian.⁷³

Webster's final pre-World War II political publication was a revised reprint of a series of articles she wrote for The Patriot, "Germany and England" (1938). The lengthy pamphlet criticized Britain's response to events in Europe, arguing that "Bolshevism" posed a much greater threat than Nazism. Hitler's emphasis on "the superiority of the German race" "is only logical, since the essence of Fascism and Nazi-ism is Nationalism, whilst that of Bolshevism is Internationalism."⁷⁴ Thus, she claimed, Britain should not fear him, or Nazism. Webster did argue that she was "no blind admirer of Hitler," complaining that like most Britons, she preferred a regime of greater freedom. In addition, she criticized his policies, because by "driving out the Communists and Jews into other countries in such a way to enlist sympathy for them, instead of keeping them humanely under control in his own, he disregards the fact that he is helping to spread Bolshevism abroad and actually to strengthen the Jewish power."⁷⁵ It was the grand conspiracy that once again posed the most serious danger to Britain. Indeed, Webster concluded that "the Jewish problem" could best be solved by creating a homeland for the Jews in "the vast unpeopled spaces of Soviet Russia," and that the "fabulous wealth of rich Jews all over the world could be used to settle them there."⁷⁶ For Webster, the shadow of war hanging over England was one that could easily be dissipated. It required recognition that war might bring about the end of civilization, and that the real threat to Britain lay in the alien forces of the conspiracy.

Webster published much less frequently following the outbreak of World War II. Because the details of the final two decades of her life are largely unknown, however, it is difficult to assess whether her husband's death in spring 1942 was responsible for this decline in output or whether Hitler's role in World War II prompted her to revise her views on fascism.⁷⁷ She wrote a limited number of articles for The Patriot until its demise in 1950, and following that published only her final book, the autobiography Spacious Days (1950). During these years she also apparently took up correspondence with the right-wing American writer Revilo Oliver, and she apparently completed the second volume of her autobiography in this period.⁷⁸ It was never published. Webster died in May 1960.⁷⁹

Webster's Influence

Webster was an important political figure during her lifetime, but she is perhaps even more influential today. Her ideas have taken root in the American far right, and in religious and political movements around the world, including many radical Islamist groups.⁸⁰

In The Party of Fear, historian David Bennett has traced the history of extreme right-wing politics in the United States. His examination found that versions of the Illuminati conspiracy theory have been present in American political thought from the 1790s onward.⁸¹ Webster's version of this theory has proved most popular in the late-twentieth-century American right. Michael Barkun, a political scientist, has noted that her ideas first appeared in the United States in a 1935 pamphlet by Gerald Winrod entitled "Adam Weishaupt, a Human Devil."⁸² It is almost certainly the case, however, that her work was first popularized in America by Robert Welch and the John Birch Society. In a 1966 article in the Society's periodical American Opinion, Welch brought Webster's work to the attention of the Birch Society

membership.⁸³ From there, and as copyright protection ended on her publications, it spread across the American right. Its most influential appearance, however, was in 1994. In that year, the Reverend Murion Gordon "Pat" Robertson further popularized Webster's ideas in his bestselling book, *The New World Order*. There, he cited Webster's World Revolution directly, focusing on her analysis of Adam Weishaupt and the Illuminati.⁸⁴

Robertson's political influence and appeal to mainstream Americans is undeniable. He is the founder of the Christian Coalition, which, with over one million members, has been identified as the "most powerful grassroots movement in American politics." Robertson is also the center of an educational/media conglomerate that includes Regent University and the American Center for Law and Justice, as well as the Family Channel and the Christian Broadcasting Network. His religious conferences attract such mainstream keynote speakers as Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, Jack Kemp, and Dinesh D'Souza.⁸⁵

The pathological aspects of these ideas are many; two will be noted here. First, although Webster explicitly denied that she was anti-Semitic, her arguments, and thus those of Robertson, have strong anti-Semitic themes. Although Webster developed her own unique conspiracy theory, she implicitly supported the sentiments expressed in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and included The Protocols as an appendix to secret Societies (1924).⁸⁶ In his popularization of Webster's conspiracy theory, Robertson has also popularized anti-Semitism and implied that it is a respectable ideology.

Secondly, Webster's ideas, both through Robertson and in their original form, have taken root in the American Patriot and Militia movements. Although diverse, their ideologies share a number of themes. Generally speaking, their conspiracy theories envision the imminent demise of the United States, and the imprisonment of freedom-loving Americans. In the religious versions of this theory, the coming "New World Order" is equated with the advent of the Anti-Christ. The United Nations will be its earthly governor. There are many reasons for the emergence of such movements, and their ideologies embody many complex and often contradictory themes. Undeniably, however, Webster's ideas constitute a major component of their belief system. Her ideas are cited directly, and often indirectly through the John Birch Society's interpretation of her early publications.⁸⁷

What is perhaps of most interest is that a number of radical Islamist movements have used Webster's ideas in their writings. The Islamic Party of Britain, for example, uses Webster's work to explain Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the creation of Israel, and the fall of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁸ These arguments support contentions that the events of 11 September 2001 were part of a complex plan to destroy Islam because it is the last bulwark against Illuminism's subjugation of humanity.

Conclusion

Nesta Webster wrote during a period of intense social and political change in Great Britain; scholars have suggested that it is these types of eras that most typically produce conspiracy theory. Individuals are driven to explain the upheaval that surrounds them. As social psychologist Serge Moscovici has written, conspiracy theories are an attempt to integrate "one's image of society in one cause."⁸⁹ They are one way of eliminating cognitive dissonance, a situation where personal beliefs and reality conflict. A conspiracy theory allows one's own interpretation of the world to remain intact. All threats to it are explained by a single omnipresent force.

Webster was threatened by challenges to the British Empire and its social hierarchy. Although her beliefs about the capabilities of women and her own political activism were non-traditional-and would have been appropriate for a more modern Britain-she was primarily concerned about the preservation of traditional society. As a result, she neglected her more feminist beliefs in order to pursue what she believed was a greater cause: warning the world of the conspiracy that threatened British civilization. Thus, like women of the left who have participated in activism for a larger cause (for example, nationalist movements), Webster chose to put her feminism second.⁹⁰

Three major themes dominated Webster's life and work: the desire to protect British civilization (as she defined it), the fear of those who threatened that British civilization, and the conviction that forces beyond the control of average citizens manipulated politics and its outcomes. For Webster, these beliefs helped provide an explanation for the political change that occurred during her lifetime. At the same time as they functioned to ease Webster's (and her British followers') transition into a Britain that was no longer dominated by traditional social hierarchies and was losing its grasp on imperial dominion, they also created particular contradictions, especially for Webster herself.

Webster was a member of the British upper class and, following her education, was frustrated by the limited number of careers open to women. Indeed, she later wrote that meaningful employment was critical for women's development. Although she resisted marriage for her early life-even going so far as to criticize the institution in her first novel *The*

Sheep Track-Webster eventually married. Doing so meant she did not need to find "meaningful employment" and could remain at home, writing.

Webster's writings about women also evidenced these kinds of contradictions. While she argued that women were most effective as a civilizing influence on men, she also argued that women did not know their own potential, as they had yet been unable to secure reasonable education and employment training. On a number of occasions, she also implied that women were more politically aware than men. Despite these convictions, Webster easily abandoned her writing on women and focused her attention on revealing the influence of secret societies on both the French Revolution and twentieth-century world politics. This focus gained her lasting political influence.

The modern political and religious movements that utilize Webster's ideas have focused on her conspiracy writings. Once again, her work provides a refuge from the threat of modernity and globalization. Conspiracy theories are a way of explaining how one's group has been wronged by history, and they provide a clear identification of those who are at fault. Such belief systems typically assume a past golden age, and prophesy that with the overcoming of the enemy, that golden age can be reborn.

Paradoxically, the movements that utilize Webster's ideas today tend to assume that women's roles in that golden age were traditional. They use Webster's analysis to justify a worldview that sees women's actions limited to the private realm. If there was one curious aspect to Webster's conspiratorial and pathological view of the world, it was that she did not limit women in that way. For Webster, women's place in fighting conspiratorial forces was ambiguous. It may be the case (although we cannot know for certain) that given her views on women, the golden age for the British Empire that she was attempting to restore might have seen an expanded political role for women.

As an author, "historian," and political activist, Webster stood out among the women of her day. She also stands out among modern rightwing women, who, as Blee and others suggest, tend toward traditional roles and typically are not leaders in the movements in which they participate. For all of these reasons, Webster is a remarkable case study, whose life and work suggest that right-wing extremist women deserve further analysis. Their lives and work, although often politically repelling, are complex. We ignore them at our peril.

[Footnote]

NOTES

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1 Julie Gottlieb, Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement, 1923-1945 (London: LB. Tauris, 2000), 11,147-76. Gottlieb presents an interesting discussion of suffragette involvement in the British Union of Fascists that focuses on Mary Richardson, Norah Elam, and Mary Allen.

2 On 1920s American feminism and the idea of "civilization work," see Louise Michele Newman, White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. 8-12.

3 See, for example, Julie Storm Farr, The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903-1932 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987); Martin Durham, Women and Fascism (London: Routledge, 1998); and Gottlieb, Feminine Fascism.

4 Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow, eds., British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 16.

5 See, for example, Michael Barkun, A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); George Johnson, Architects of Fear (Los Angeles: J. Tarcher Ltd., 1983); and Mark Fenster, Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

6 Kathleen Blee, Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 12-13; and Nigel Fielding, "Mediating the Message: Affinity and Hostility in Research on Sensitive Topics," in Claire Renzetti and Raymond Lee, eds., Researching Sensitive Topics (Newbury: Sage, 1993), 146-80.

7 Gilman determined her writings were too voluminous to include, and noted in his introduction that he would deal with them in a second book (not yet published). Richard Gilman, Behind World Revolution (Ann Arbor, MI: Insights Books, 1982), vii-viii.

8 William McIlhany, Director of the Individualist Research Foundation and John Birch Society speaker, claims to have Webster's notes on specific conspiracies for The French Revolution. William McIlhany, email, 8 November 2003.

9 Nesta Webster, Spacious Days (London: Hutchinson and Company, Ltd., 1950), 191.

10 The book was entitled Crowded Hours; Gilman claims that it was stolen. Behind World Revolution, 53.

11 See, for example, Jean Hardisty, Mobilizing Resentment (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); and Andrea Dworkin, Right-Wing Women (New York: Pedigree Books, 1982).

12 Blee, Inside Organized Racism, 30-32.

13 Ibid., 34-43.

14 Ibid., 34-53.

15 Webster, Spacious Days, 11-13.

16 Ibid., 32-37.

17 Ibid., 36.

18 Ibid., 37, 38.

- 19Ibid., 47-48, 52.
- 20Ibid., 13 and 56.
- 21Ibid., 58, 59.
- 22Ibid., 84.
- 23Ibid., 103.
- 24Ibid., 113. Webster noted that twenty years after her visit, "agitators" spread unrest in Burma. "With such diabolical cunning do the agents of world unrest set about their work!" Ibid., 112.
- 25Ibid., 84.
- 26Ibid., 138.
- 27Ibid., 149. Gilman, *Behind World Revolution*, 65.
- 28Webster, *Spacious Days*, 166.
- 29Nesta Webster, *The Sheep Track* (London: John Murray, 1924), 442.
- 30Seneca, cited in *The Sheep Track*, 442.
- 31"The Sheep Track," *The New York Times*, 16 March 1919, 137. See also Lucian Gary, "Recent Fiction," *The Dial*, 16 August 1914, 107; "The Sheep Track," *The Spectator*, 11 April 1913, 617; "The Sheep Track," *The New York Times*, 16 August 1914, 346; and "The Sheep Track," *The Bookman* (1914), 94-95.
- 32Nesta Webster, *Britain's Call to Arms: An Appeal to Our Women* (London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1914), 4-5.
- 33Ibid., 14.
- 34Nesta Webster, "Women and Civilisation," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 88, no. 525 (1920), 750.
- 35Ibid., 754.
- 36Ibid., 759.
- 37Webster, *Spacious Days*, 171.
- 38She was, however, unwilling to conclude that reincarnation was the only possible reason for her familiarity with pre-revolutionary France. Webster had great sympathy for theories of extra-sensory perception, and suggested that it might also have been the result of ancestral memory (her grandfather might have known of it, or her mother might have read about France while pregnant with Nesta), or might even have been "conveyed from the minds of those who have passed over, 'spirit presences' around us, or even of those still living on the earth (emphasis in original)."
- 39Gilman, *Behind World Revolution*, 32. In her review of *Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette Before the Revolution*, Gertrude Bagley also notes that Webster's Chevalier was a "best-seller." G. Bagley, "Nearing the End of the Bourbons," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 16 April 1938, 2.
- 40Thurlow compares Webster's skills to those of Lady Antonia Fraser. Richard Thurlow, "The Powers of Darkness, Conspiracy Belief and Political Strategy," *Patterns of Prejudice* 12, no. 6 (1978), 11.
- 41Webster, *Spacious Days*, 185, 187.
- 42Sidney B. Fay, "The French Revolution," *The American Political Science Review* 14, no. 4 (1920), 732-33.
- 43When she wrote, "The people may make riots, but never revolutions," Webster was quoting Le Bon's *Psychologie des Revolutions*. Webster, *Spacious Days*, 187.
- 44Ibid.
- 45Indeed, in *The American Historical Review*, Fred Fling wrote that the book could have been written by Marie Antoinette had she "possessed the industry to accomplish the large amount of reading." In *The American Political Science Review*, Sidney Fay commented that it "reads like an anti-bolshevist account of the Russian Revolution." Webster would likely have been pleased by both remarks. Fred Fling, "The French Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 25 no. 4 (1920), 714; and Sidney B. Fay, "The French Revolution," *American Political Science Review* 14, no. 4 (1920), 733.
- 46Nesta Webster, *The Past History of the World Revolution: Lecture delivered at the Royal Artillery Institution, Woolwich, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 1920* (Royal Artillery Institution Printing House, 1921), 468-470, 473-74.
- 47Nesta Webster, *World Revolution: The Plot Against Civilization* (London: Constable and Company, 1921), viii.
- 48Ibid.
- 49Nesta Webster, "Illuminism and the World Revolution," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 88 (July-December 1920), 97-99.
- 50Ibid., 101-102.
- 51Webster, *World Revolution*, viii.
- 52Ibid., 327.
- 53Webster, *World Revolution*, 322-23.
- 54Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 229.
- 55Winston Churchill, "Zionism versus Bolshevism: A Struggle for the Soul of the Jewish People," *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 February 1920, 5.
- 56Nesta Webster, *secret Societies and Subversive Movements* (London: Boswell, 1924), v.
- 57Ibid., 369.
- 58Ibid., 373.
- 59Ibid., 391-92.
- 60Ibid., 399.
- 61Ibid., 400.
- 62Ibid., 401. Webster suggested that if one power controlled the rest, it was either the Pan-German Power, the Jewish Power, or Illuminism. She concluded that it might be the Germans and Jews working through a secret inner circle within the Illuminati. If this was so, she hypothesized that the Germans (who hoped to destroy the Allies) might be working with the Jews (who hoped to destroy Christian civilization). A second possible scenario was that the hidden center of power consisted solely of Jews, who were using both the Pan-Germans and the Gentile Illuminati as their tools. Ibid., 403.
- 63Ibid., 404.

64See, for example, the cover story, "The Progress of World Revolution," *The Patriot*, 1 October 1925, 457-58. Advertisements

- for her books were often included in the paper.
- 65Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 27. The British Fascists Ltd. was originally the British Fascisti; it changed its name in May 1924. See Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 21-22.
- 66Gottlieb has noted that women in the British Fascists tended to have similar backgrounds. They were of the middle and upper classes, many had served in the military, had a role in administering the Empire, and had landed status. A number were also titled. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 30-31.
- 67Barbara Storm Farr, *The Development and Impact of Right-Wing Politics in Britain, 1903-1932* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 76.
- 68See, for example, "Mrs. Nesta H. Webster on Fascism," *The British Lion*, 7 January 1927, 7.
- 69Nesta Webster, "The Patriots' Inquiry Centre," *Correspondence, The Patriot*, 20 October 1927, 382. The same issue welcomes Mrs. Webster to the ranks of British Fascism. The Fascisti party was not long-lived. Gottlieb and Durham argue that it inevitably failed because it had no viable leader, and because its platform was not fully fascist. see Durham, *Women and Fascism*, 27; and Gottlieb, *feminine Fascism*, 34.
- 70Webster, "The Patriots' Inquiry Centre," *The Patriot*, 382-83. See also *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 1927, cited in Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, 31.
- 71Nesta Webster, "'Where are We Going?' Part I, 'Socialist Dreams,'" *The Patriot*, 9 January 1947, 19-20.
- 72They were followed by another journal article in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, "Marie Antoinette: A Slandered Queen," 121, no. 721 (March 1937), 372-82.
- 73See, for example, Katherine Woods, "Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI Before the Revolution," *The New York Times Book Review*, 16 January 1938, 9; and Alan Taylor, "Two Biographies," *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1936, 7.
- 74Nesta Webster, *Germany and England* (London: Boswell, 1938), 15.
- 75Ibid., 25.
- 76Ibid., 34.
- 77Isle of Wight County Press, 25 April 1942, cited in Gilman, *Behind World Revolution*, 51.
- 78Gilman, *Behind World Revolution*, 53.
- 79S.L., "Mrs. Nesta Webster, Studies in French History," obituary, *The Times*, 18 May 1960, 17. The revised sixth edition of *World Revolution* appeared in 1960. It was edited by Anthony Gittens, however, not Webster.
- 80In addition to the movements addressed here, Webster's work is influential in other, less-organized groups. It is for sale at a multitude of internet bookstores, including those of other modern, far-right parties, including the British National Front. See, for example, http://www.bnplondon.org/booklist/books_miscellaneous.htm, last accessed 2 May 2005.
- 81David Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
- 82Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, 49.
- 83Robert Welch, "The Truth in Time," *American Opinion* 9, no. 10 (1966), 1-26.
- 84Pal Robertson, *The New World Order* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991). See esp. 71, 180-81.
- 85Michael Lind, "Rev. Robertson's Grand International Conspiracy Theory," *The New York Review*, 2 February 1995, 21-25.
- 86Webster wrote that the authenticity of the Protocols was an open question, but noted that their resemblance to the programs of certain secret societies-particularly Illuminism-was "extraordinary." While claiming to be open-minded on this issue, she therefore underhandedly suggests they may be authentic. See *secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, 408-409, and *World Revolution: The Plot Against Civilization*, 296-306.
- 87Benjamin Epstein and Arnold Forster, *The Radical Right: A Report on the John Birch Society and its Allies* (New York: Random House, 1967), 33-34, 111.
- 88See, for example, Islamic Party of Britain, "Satanic Voices," 26 March 2003, <http://www.islamicparty.com/satvoices/acknowledgements.htm>, last accessed 2 May 2005.
- 89Serge Moscovici, "The Conspiracy Mentality," in Carl F. Graumann and Serge Moscovici, *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy* (London: Springer-Verlag, 1987), 157.
- 90See, for example, Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 61-64.

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